NATIONAL IDENTITY AND REGIONALIZATION

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Despite the large volume of the published literature on identity, there is a pressing need to review[1] its most important elements, including its concept, components and the various issues it raises.

The specification of the concept of identity should not be expanded to such extent that it would lose some of the national distinctive features demarcating it from other concepts. Nor should it be narrowed down to such extent that it would be confined to limited specificities, whose orientation would be controlled by mostly racial political motives. In general, identity refers to the nature, role, entity and affiliation, as well as the materialization of such belonging in the consciousness and unconsciousness to prove the will of existence and life for both individuals and groups.

National identity is embodied in stable elements and regulating values, due to the continuous adherence to it down the ages and generations, with honest love, intellectual and psychological ties that attract these generations, making them all interact with it, with or without deep awareness. That is in a quite spontaneous and natural fashion.

In its stability, the invariability of its main elements and core components, it may be exposed to some development factors, or even subjected to change imposed by the nature of the universe characterized by its multiversity and diversity. Such change is also imposed by the interaction of the self with itself and with others. This leads to achieving the human dimension that undoubtedly

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(1) See the publications of the author below:

- **Culture: from identity to dialogue** (Publications of Al Jirari Club, Volume 3 - First edition- Rabat, June 1993).
- **Self and the other** (Publications of Al Jirari Club, Volume 13 - First edition- Rabat- April 1998).
- **Our identity and globalization** (Publications of Al Jirari Club, Volume 18 - first edition- Al Umniya Printing House- Rabat - December 2000).
- **Issues for reflection from an Islamic perspective II** (Publications of Al Jirari Club, Volume 45- First edition- Rabat- June 2008).

enriches the identity experiences, providing it with vital and creative areas, where it would strengthen its openness factors, and the possibilities of exchanging mutual influence.

Thus, identity urges the individuals who relate to it to build and develop their home-country, seeking its progress, to defend it and preserve its dignity. They are called to open up its future prospects, overcome the challenges facing it, facing the obstacles hindering its progress. They are also encouraged to address the external and internal dangers that threaten it, especially those stemming from the misconduct of the self, hindering the preservation of the pride of the citizens this country and respect of their humanity, ensuring their rights and obligations, under stable conditions, fair governance, justice based on equal opportunities and solidarity among them, without any discrimination or favoritism. An exception to such equality relates to the extent of defending the components of identity and the required efforts and sacrifice which people undoubtedly make at varying degrees.

Four components constitute identity and interact with it:

First: Home-country, which consists of the territory, space and the associated time reflecting its history, including various natural and human elements, and the resulting political, economical conditions as well as social and behavioral patterns.

The home-country (nation) for us is Morocco, characterized by its geographical location at the top of the African continent, overlooking two great seas, the Mediterranean and Atlantic Ocean, and standing close to Europe, serving as a way-station between East and West. This advantage has enriched its environment which is characterized by diversity and multiplicity, allowing it to be open to many civilizations and cultures, with which it has always been interacting through multifaceted exchange.

Confirming to this status, the text of the Moroccan Constitution[(2)] stipulates in its preamble that the Kingdom of Morocco is a unified state with full sovereignty belonging to the Great Maghreb …. is committed to:

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(2) His Majesty King Mohammed VI announced the start of the revision of the Constitution in his speech delivered on 9 March 2011(4 Rabia II, 1432 AH). He appointed the Advisory Council in charge of this revision, chaired by Mr. Abdellatif Manouni, on the following Thursday. The Referendum on the New Constitution was conducted on Friday 1 July 2011. The results of the Referendum were announced by the Constitutional Council (decision no 851-2011) on 14 July 2011. A Dahir was issued under no 1.11.91 for the enactment of the text of the Constitution on 29 July 2011. It was published in the Official Bulletin no 5964 bis on 30 July 2011.

- Working towards building the Maghreb Union as a strategic option.
- Consolidating the bonds of belonging to the Arab and Islamic nation and strengthening the bonds of brotherhood and solidarity with the brotherly peoples.
- Strengthening cooperation and solidarity relations with the peoples and countries of Africa, especially with the Sahel and Sub-Saharan countries.
- Strengthening the ties of cooperation, convergence and partnership with Euro-Mediterranean neighbor countries.
- Expanding and diversifying friendship relations, and humanitarian economic, scientific, technical and cultural exchanges with all countries worldwide.
- Consolidating South-South cooperation.

Second: Religion, with its impact on believers, its jurisprudence which permeates all systems that regulate the functioning of the nation, and the resulting ideas, concepts, perceptions and principles which guide citizens' way of life.

Religion in Morocco is Islam, which exceeded being a mere belief, accommodating the Jewish minority that shared with it citizenship in freedom and tolerance. It has become, due to its holiness and commitment, a symbol of national identity and unity, as well as internal feeling in the conscious and subconscious, without which life is inconceivable.

The Moroccan Constitution stipulates the religious component on many occasions, recalling in the second paragraph of its preamble, that “the Kingdom of Morocco is an Islamic country with full sovereignty”, and “Moroccan identity is characterized by the forefront position of the Islamic religion therein.” Article 3 of the first Chapter states that “Islam is the religion of the State,” stressing the provision mentioned in Article 1 in this Chapter the invariable principles of identity: “The nation hinges in its public life on comprehensive invariable principles embodied in Islam, the tolerant religion, national unity with its numerous branches, Constitutional monarchy, and the democratic choice.”

The situation of the State in this Islamic framework, or considering its frame of reference Islamic, does not mean that it is not endowed with modern institutions and laws similar to those available in the countries that apply civil systems, in the sense close to secularism. Indeed, the religious nature of the State is not incompatible with civilian authorities and the values they call for, as it is

stipulated in many places of the Moroccan Constitution[3] such as freedom, democracy, individual and collective rights. Such values include political practice, which constitutes an important part in conducting state affairs in Islam, is not at odds with it, though Article 7 of the first Chapter stipulates, as a matter of reserve, that "political parties may not be established on religious, linguistic, ethnic or regional basis, and generally on the basis of any discrimination or violation of human rights."

The provisions of the Constitution stipulating these "civil" principles removes any ambiguity, though they raise some ambiguity that could be exploited wrongly in order to raise the fear of converting the State by this frame of reference to an theocratic state based on the divine absolute rule, as was common in many European countries, especially France and England, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This allegation is denied by Islam and rejected by its principles that do not make of the ruler - impartial or partial - a tyrant, deriving its authority from a mandate issued by the Creator, who will alone ask him about how it was used.[4]

(3) See, for instance , Article 25 of Chapter 1 on "Freedom of thought, opinion and expression", Article 26 of Chapter 1 on the development of "Cultural and artistic creation and scientific and technological research", Article 28 of Chapter 1, providing for the preservation of "freedom of the press" and "the right of expression and dissemination of information, ideas and opinions, freely and without any constraint, unless otherwise provided under the Law", Article 29 of Chapter 1 on "freedom of meeting, gathering, peaceful demonstration, establishing associations as well as union and political affiliation", Article 16 of Chapter 1 on the "protection of legal rights and interests of Moroccan citizens living abroad", Article 19 of Chapter 2 which stipulates that men and women on equal footing enjoy civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights and freedoms". See also Article 31 of Chapter 2 on the obligations of the State for citizens to benefit from their rights, Article 161 of Chapter 12 on the National Council for Human Rights, and Article 163 on the Council of the Moroccan Community Living Abroad.

(4) To preclude this erroneous conception, the Constitution specified the powers of His Majesty the King, and his constitutional rights in the management of institutions. Article 1 of General Provisions stipulates that "Morocco is a constitutional, democratic, parliamentary and social Monarchy. The constitutional regime of the Kingdom is founded on the separation, balance and collaboration of powers". It also states in Article 2 that "sovereignty belongs to the Nation, which exercises it directly through referendum and indirectly through its representatives." Chapter 3 on the monarchy stipulates in Article 41 that "the King, Commander of the Faithful, sees to the respect for Islam. He is the Guarantor of the free exercise of religious affairs. He presides over the Superior Council of Ulemas (Islamic Scholars). Article 42 states that The King Head of State, His Supreme Representative, Symbol of the unity of the Nation, Guarantor of the permanence and continuity of the State and Supreme Arbitrator between its institutions. He is the Guarantor of the independence of the country and the territorial integrity of the Kingdom. The King exercises these missions by Dahirs by virtue of the powers that are expressly devolved to him under the Constitution. Article 47 stipulates that the King appoints the Head of Government from within the political party ranking first in the elections of the members of the Chamber of representatives. On the proposal of the Head of Government, He

Given that Islam is the State religion, it "ensures for every individual the freedom of practicing their religious affairs", as provided under Chapter III of the Constitution. Unlike the constitutions of other Islamic countries, the Moroccan Constitution does not mention the concept of "freedom of belief", to which reference is motivated by the existence of non-Muslim citizens in the countries of such constitutions. The provision for "freedom of religious practice" in the abovementioned Article 3 is considered as a precautionary smart move that does not preclude the existence of a Jewish minority that has the right to freely practice their religious affairs.

Third: Language, as a mean of communication, a structure for messages, an envelope for thought, a tool for literary expression, artistic creativity, and expression of emotions and feelings.

Language in Morocco is standard Arabic, along with of many other local languages and dialects that enrich it, including Berber and Hassaniyya as well as other Arabic dialects used in rural and urban areas. The status of Standard Arabic is corroborated by the fact that it is the language of the Holy Quran, and it is the vehicle through which the rich heritage of various areas of science and arts was produced.

Therefore language is considered a means of self-protection and self-defense, which spares us it from the dependence on any foreign language and falling in the grip of its hegemony. Learning other languages should not be neglected, however, since their use is imposed by reality and modern circumstances, specially English and Spanish, as well as the French language, inherited from the colonial period, making us believe in the past that French was the only way to achieve progress and catch up with the developed world, even though it lost its status in the international arena.

The Constitution provides for the linguistic component of identity, as it stipulates in Article 5 of Chapter 5 that:

- Arabic is the official language of the State. The State works for the protection and for the development of the Arabic language, as well as the promotion of its use.

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appoints the members of the Government." In Article 48 "the King presides over the Council of Ministers". In Article 53, "he King is the Supreme Head of the Royal Armed Forces." In Article 55 "The King accredits the ambassadors to foreign powers and to the international organizations. In Article 56 "the King presides over the Superior Council of the Judicial Power", which is confirmed in Article 115 of Chapter 7.

- Berber constitutes an official language of the State, being common patrimony of all Moroccans without exception. An organic law shall define the process of the implementation of the official character of this language, as well as the modalities of its integration into education and the priority domains of public life, so that it will be in time capable of fulfilling its function as an official language.
- The State shall work for the preservation of Hassaniyya[5], as an integral component of the unified Moroccan cultural identity, as well as the protection of dialects and cultural expressions used in Morocco. Likewise, it sees to the coherence of linguistic policy and national culture and the learning and mastery of foreign languages most widely used in the world, as tools of communication, integration and interaction with knowledge society, and opening onto different cultures and contemporary civilizations.

To this end, the same Article stipulates that "a National Council of Languages and Moroccan Culture shall be created, in charge of the protection and development of Arabic and Berber languages and the diverse Moroccan cultural expressions, which constitute an authentic heritage and contemporary creation. It brings together the entire set of institutions concerned with these domains. An organic law determines its attributions, composition and operation modalities".[6]

Fourth: Culture , including this heritage that has been accumulated down the ages and generations, as well as the achievements produced by the citizens of the nation in all cognitive, spiritual and emotional areas , and other skills that reflecting their persona and their personality.

Culture in Morocco reflects the creative capacity and genius of Moroccans, specially their creative contribution that has enriched the Arab, Islamic and human culture via their scholarly, scholastic and grass-root creativeness, and even via their regular daily life practices.

(5) A variety of Arabic originally spoken in southern Morocco.

(6) The author has proposed a solution to the integration of Berber in education programs, in paper entitled "**The meaning of the constitutional nature of language**", presented to the National Symposium organized by the Committee on Values and Heritage at the Academy of the Kingdom of Morocco, in Rabat on "**Arabic Language in media, administrative and legislative discourse in Morocco**", on 20-21 October 2010. (See the proceedings that appeared in the publications of the Academy).
See the paper also in "**Selected Texts**" on the website of the author: www.abbesjirari.com

Due to its ties with the rest of the components of identity, particularly the language component, and its intellectual pattern, culture is characterized by distinctive specificities that allow it to conduct exchange with others. It enriches itself thanks to its capacity to absorb the elements of adaptation and factors renewal as well as its interaction with other cultures. It thereby crisscrosses all circumstances of time and space, while preserving its own vitality and unique peculiarities, without neglecting the requirements of the knowledge-based era, marked by information revolution, and the launch of human capacity for creativity in various fields.

In its preamble the Moroccan Constitution summed up the main elements constituting the cultural component: Islamic-Arab, Berber and Saharan-Hassaniyya, enriched with its African, Andalusian, Hebrew and Mediterranean components.



Thanks to these foundations and attributes, national identity turns into energy that driving towards knowing the self and genius it is endowed with, as well as the capacity to ensure the necessary needs for building the Nation, and the required attitudes. Hence, it is considered as the fortress to which everybody recourses in order to defend the nation in times of crisis.

Identity, first and foremost, includes invariable, viable and sustainable content, due to its relation with historical, social, intellectual and psychological elements, themselves also subject to well-determined laws and conditions. It also includes variable content, since it is subject to factors of society that tends to development and even change.

Therefore, sticking to identity -including recalling and raising awareness to it- is due to the fear of losing national specificities, and the imposition of the globalization model with its economic and marketing schemes. This model involves cultural dimensions and behavioral patterns that could lead to the imposition of its hegemony and sovereignty over nations, as a polarity unit that control the universe. The concept of national sovereignty has shrunk so much that the international community, with its financial, technological, military and media power, may very well intervene in the affairs of sovereign states, which could lead to the violation of such sovereignty. The fight of terrorism and tracking it down in its alleged pockets has been a pretext for this intervention, particularly in third world and Islamic countries.

This attitude towards globalization does not mean self-confinement and rejecting the others who imposed their scientific, technical, and production progress. Rather we are required to work with the other, using our economic and scientific capacities, great resources and strategic locations that qualify us for exchange and competition.

This requires our communities and their officials to wake up and overcome their vanity, to review their plans and management methods which they have adopted, or perhaps imposed for long periods, and realize that such methods are obsolete and unacceptable.



National identity, with its invariability and renewal, expands and shrinks, since it is a network amenable to growth and branching off. It expands as a result of interaction with other identities, especially those with which it shares overt or covert components. It narrows down, branching off small local identities, as a result of the nation's plurality and diversity.

The Moroccan Constitution stipulates in Article 135 of Chapter 9 on regions and territorial communities that “The territorial collectivities of the Kingdom are the regions, prefectures, provinces and communes. They constitute moral persons of public law, which democratically manage their affairs. Article 136 also states that “the territorial organization of the Kingdom is based on the principle of free administration, cooperation and solidarity. It ensures the participation of the populations concerned in the management of their affairs and promotes their contribution to integrated, sustainable human development.[7]

Based on this concept, the Royal speech revealed at the appointment of the Regionalization Advisory Committee[8] that “the targeted extended regionalization is not merely a technical or administrative measure, but a decisive orientation for the development and modernization of the state structures and the promotion of integrated development.”

His Majesty's speech highlighted the four foundations which regionalization is based on:

(7) Chapter 9 of the Constitution devotes many articles - from 135 to 146 - to discuss regionalization.

(8) In Marrakech, 3 January 2010.

First: Sticking to the nation's sacred entities and laws in the unity of the state, the nation and territory ….

Second: Commitment to solidarity, regionalization should not be reduced to just a new distribution of powers between the center and regions…

Third: Adoption of coordinated and balanced powers and potentials, as well as avoiding overlapping or clashing mandates among the different local communities, authorities and institutions.

Fourth: Adopting the extended decentralization without which regionalization will not be effective, as it should be activated within effective territorial governance based on coherence and interaction."

The goal, as the royal speech indicated, is "to achieve fundamental objectives, chief of which is to specify autonomous and viable regions through the development of rational and realistic criteria for a new regionalization system. The second objective is the emergence of democratic councils endowed with enough powers and resources to promote integrated regionalization."

In the light of these royal orientations and Constitutional articles, the possibility of achieving regionalization can be delivered based on three elements:

First: Geography represented in the space, the nature of the land, including plains and rough terrain , the resources it that constitute the wealth and bounties granted by God it the area, be it abundant or scarce, and how all this is reflected on the mentality of the population living in this land.

Second: History, including its incidents, events, policy makers, and masterminds of challenges and constraints down the ages, not only locally, but also at the level of relations with the rest of the regions, with the center and even beyond. These relations were not free of snags and disturbances.

Third: Culture, including all its academic, scholastic and grass-root aspects, as well as the related creativity forms, thinking patterns and behavior types, and the ensuing customs and traditions.

These factors strongly impact economic, social, and cultural life, constituting thereby a regional specificity showing a unique character. It can overlap with the specificities of other regions, constituting unity that enriches the invariable principles that compose the nation's identity and unity, strengthening its components without any incongruence or clash. However, overcoming some sensitive issues needs awareness-raising and a sense of citizenship, with a view to getting rid of

its causes. This would be possible by the dissemination of education and family socialization, as well as spreading justice and democracy and generalizing comprehensive development, making it available to all citizens. This would eradicate the notions of "useful and useless Morocco", and the dichotomy "city and countryside", "center and periphery". This would also guarantee the integration and cohesion of all regions, and enable each region to independently promote the foundations of a character viable for activation and renewal. This would also eliminate the vestiges of the colonial period, which built its policy on differentiation and division. This policy unfortunately found who adheres to it and nourish it under independence.

As part of this disburdening process, there is a pressing need the reform of institutions and the fight against corruption, as well as a fair distribution of wealth and the involvement of citizens in the management of their affairs. This cannot be achieved by a territorial solution that adopts technical and bureaucratic measures. Due to its complex political and cultural nature, this issue needs to take into account the entire set of components involved, including the overt elements and the covert ones that need to be detect freely, scientifically, objectively and rationally. First and foremost, this endeavor should be conducted with a national vision that needs to be clear. If the regional partition remains ambiguous, it would be impossible to establish its laws and enact its regulations, which will have a negative impact on the upcoming local community elections, which involve many sensitive issues.



Belonging to a particular region -any region- is the affiliation to an identity rather than simply a territory subject to a specific administrative division. It is not a self-isolated identity but it brings itself closer to an extended one, to join it and integrate with it, without losing the color of its local specificity.

Specificity is considered as a differentiation element if it is seen in a limited narrow vision that could lead to consequences threatening national unity. At the same time it constitutes a rapprochement element if it is viewed through a far-reaching extended vision, which guarantees the continuity of this unity, ensuring security and stability. This vision requires ensuring; with full awareness and conviction, that regional affiliation does not override national affiliation. That is; local specificities do not outweigh the invariable components of the nation, because this involves a threat to unity, despite the possible objective motives conducive to it, as result of accumulated demerits.

However, rapprochement is almost inevitable, because human nature as created by God shows that individuals tend to get to know each other and cooperate with other individuals to ensure their livelihood and happiness. Individuals progressively work their way up until they reach the community, which extends from one circle to a larger one, starting from the human and regional territory in which they live up to the level of citizenship in large framework; namely the state.

The extended regionalization is not a temporary political move, or merely a means to reach a political solution to the Sahara issue(9) through the call for autonomy. Rather, it is a choice to achieve the reforms expected by Moroccans, in order to build a unified and strong Morocco, characterized by modernity and cohesion, in which the region and the center are coordinated and consistent at the political, economic, social and cultural levels. Put differently, this move is intended to establish a state capable, on the basis of the values of its national components and identity, to communicate with others, especially with human values, and contribute to enriching its world components, to engage its own personality and future projects in the international relations system, which is interest-oriented.

Morocco with all its regions, regardless of their number, is the nation that lives inside us and the nation where we live. We love this nation and it loves us. We identify with it not only as a piece of land where we were born and where we live, but this identification is conducted with the heart, mind and conscience as a source of wealth and a stimulant for creativity and production, as well as coexistence characterized by solidarity and harmony with those who belong to this nation, and also those who share all forms of mental attributes relation, that can be summarized as is it follows:(10)

1- Tendency to stability.

2- Strong self-awareness, capacity of openness, and awareness of the need for a communication, integration and working with others joining, meeting, and cooperating with them.

3- Love of liberty and resistance to any force whatsoever, in an extraordinary capacity of patience and endurance of crises.

4- Facing challenges and dealing with them in a practical and realistic spirit and the sense of decision-making.

(9) Moroccan Sahara covers the two regions of “Saguia el-Hamra" (literally in Arabic, Red Canal) and "Río de Oro" (literally, gold River).

(10) See our book mentioned above “Culture: from identity to dialogue,” pages: 13-14.

5- Tendency for moderation in everything, including the nature of the Ash'ari creed, Maliki doctrine and Sunni Sufism.

There is no doubt that this propensity, with its values, is the main actor in protecting Moroccans from any deviation or extremism, although this historical truth has started to be exposed to some agitation and disturbance. At any rate, the values of citizenship are preserved. They constitute the ethical system regulating the mental and behavioral relations between individuals in a given society. It includes the ideas and feelings expressed by people, whose visions and perceptions may be mostly fixed as they are related with other invariable principles in society, especially religion, while others could be subject to development and renewal according to reality. This is due to change factors, and the changes affecting customs and traditions reformulating them in minds and practice, as well as the shifts that legislation itself may undergo while dealing with reality matters.